LEC_ARCV-MMMM_Bible-W6-Towards a Critical Feminist Hermeneutics of Liberation

Metadata

Lecture Details

- "Towards a Critical Feminist Hermeneutics of Liberation"
- Professor Imler
- MMMM, the Bible
- Week 06, 25_10_19
- FBC
- #feminist-hermeneutics #biblical-interpretation #schussler-fiorenza #new-testament #synoptic-problem #social-world #ekklesia

Outline Structure

Opening: Context and Anxieties about Biblical Interpretation

- **Class Context** - Teaching at a future session on translation issues *[Argument: ARG-01]*
  - **ESV Translation Controversy** - Example from local church [the Crossing]
  - "ESV was specifically made to erase the gender neutrality of [previous translations]"
  - Wayne Grudem explicitly stated goal of removing gender-neutral language
  - **Wayne Grudem's Heresy** - Redefinition of Trinity problem
  - **Eternal Functional Subordination (EFS)** - Jesus eternally subordinate to Father
    - "He redefined the Trinity to subsume Jesus under the sun and eternal submission"

        - This is a "long-standing heresy" because it destroys equality in Trinity
    - **Purpose of the Heresy** - Creating hierarchy justification
        - "So that there's not equality in the trinity, so that there's not equality between humans"
        - Uses theological hierarchy to justify human hierarchy
    - **Stakes of Translation Debates** - Not just academic questions
    - "This is what we're really up against in this town"
    - Translation choices have real consequences for people's lives
- **Personal Background Context** - Imler's formation and anxieties
    - **Conservative Evangelical Upbringing** - Taught exclusivist theology
    - "I grew up being told that everyone who was not...my kind...did not believe the Bible"
    - Therefore couldn't believe in Jesus, therefore couldn't be saved
    - **The Anxiety of Foundationalism** - Fear of losing everything *[Argument: ARG-02]*
    - "If that's true, I get the anxiety"
    - But must ask: "Is it true? And is that a good way to frame things?"

Two Competing Models of Knowledge and Theology

- **Foundationalism: The Brick Wall Model** - Building from solid foundation *[Argument: ARG-02]*
    - **The Construction Metaphor** - Start with one good brick
    - "I can build a solid way of seeing the world...if I begin with one good, solid brick"
    - "Put it on a good, sound foundation, put a good brick next to it"
    - "If I'm a good builder...I can build a whole institution of knowledge and theology"
    - **The Appeal** - Certainty and security
    - "And it should be true. Which is nice, right?"
    - **The Vulnerability** - Any crack threatens everything
    - **Top-Down Threats** - Experience contradicts the system
        - "I was told...queer relationships aren't possible. And yet, here they are in the world"

        - "This isn't working...from experience from the world going, wait a second"
    - **Bottom-Up Threats** - Foundational assumptions prove faulty
        - "Whether it's from the top, or kind of from the bottom"
        - "A chip in the wall...from our assumptions"
    - **What's at the Center** - Identity questions
    - "Who am I? What should I be doing with myself?"
    - "Among other things, there's God, there's others, et cetera"
    - **The Crisis** - Total collapse possible
    - "When that falls apart, you can lose a sense of everything"
    - "As...everyone goes through this"
- **Coherentism: The Web Model** - Interconnected mutual support *[Argument: ARG-03]*
    - **The Web Metaphor** - Ideas as connected points
    - "What if we think about ideas as points in a web where things connect?"
    - **The Solar System Version** - Gravity and relationships
    - "Or like, a solar system where like maybe God has...a lot of gravity"
    - "And then you have other ideas that work along with it"
    - **The Galaxy Metaphor** - Complex interconnections
    - "Think of it like a galaxy, like a web, where these ideas interact with one another"
    - "And they're mutually supportive"
    - **The Resilience** - Can absorb challenges *[Argument: ARG-03]*
    - **Brick Wall Problem** - "If one of these...beliefs falls apart [in brick wall system]"
        - "Everything. Right? Yeah taken out. And everything."
    - **Web Solution** - "Some ability to...absorb some of that"
        - "And like still be okay foundationally"
    - **Student Insight** - Entire system doesn't collapse
        - Student noted that web model provides flexibility

Textual Tensions in Biblical Studies

- **The Reality of Textual Problems** - Honesty about actual difficulties
    - **Creation Account Multiplicity** - Cannot harmonize Genesis 1 and 2

    - "If we think things are inerrant, well then it's hard not to say that the earth is 10,000 years old"
    - "There's multiple creation accounts...you can't mush them together"
    - "If you mush them together, like, where'd the extra woman go?"
    - **Textual Transmission Issues** - No original manuscripts
    - "When we look back, we don't have like, God gave the text to Moses that we still have"
    - "So how do we reconstruct all these things?"
    - **Oral Tradition Concerns** - "Telephone game for 30 years"
    - But counterpoint: "If you don't trust texts, you're not going to write it down"
    - "If...this is the most important stuff on earth to you...you're probably gonna find methods and ways to keep that going without messing it up"
- **King James Only Movement Example** - Illustrating foundationalist anxiety
    - **Student Question** - "Weren't they biased at something?"
    - **Textual Tradition Split** - Two different approaches
    - **Seven Texts Approach** - "There were 7 texts, and then one guy tried to create a text out of that"
        - "And then that was like, the core text. And so that's that tradition"
        - Implication: Can declare "we have it" and move on
    - **Critical Text Approach** - "The other tradition takes all of these texts... everything we've ever found"
        - "And says, okay, given all of this, what was the most likely, most original form?"
        - "And that's just very hard"
    - **The Appeal of Certainty** - "It's easy to say, oh, we have it. See, we can just go on with our life"
        - "But maybe reality is a little bit more different or difficult"

Traditional Conservative Method: the Hermeneutical Spiral

- **Imler's Training Background** - Where he learned this method
    - **Central Christian College** - "Crazy little fundamentalist place north of here"
    - Story about sex candle prank in dorm

    - **Asbury Seminary** - "Went...for a couple of years. And this is what they taught there"
    - Connection to Bob Jones University racial case
- **The Method Structure** - Bottom-up textual analysis *[Argument: ARG-04]*
    - **Starting Point** - "Begin with the smallest unit that you're looking at. Usually a verse"
    - Imler: "Notice that's...that kind of gives away the game that they might be messing up somewhere"
    - **The Assumption** - "The meaning is...there, and then they have to...find it"
    - "That means that there's just one meaning down that you have to...dig out"
    - **Building Process** - "They begin with a single sentence or paragraph"
    - Look at immediate context
    - Examine entire book
    - Consider whole Bible
    - **The Goal** - "See, and this fits together. And then now we can do this"
    - **The Problem** - "They're building a wall and they're building a thin wall" *[Argument: ARG-04]*
- **How This Method Works in Practice** - Proof-texting danger *[Argument: ARG-05]*
- **The Process** - "What does the text say? What's the paragraph, entire book, and on out?"
    - "And then they're like, see, and this fits together. And then now we can do this"
    - **Imler's Assessment** - "They're building a wall and they're building a thin wall"

Alternative Method: Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's Seven Movements

- **Source Introduction** - *Wisdom Ways* as primary text
    - **About the Book** - "Elizabeth Schissler Fiorenza's wisdom ways...is a great, great little book"
    - "It is a little book"
    - Builds on her work *In Memory of Her*

    - **Her Project** - Looking at egalitarian emergence and contraction
    - "Looks at the egalitarian bubble that popped up in early Christianity"
    - "And then how that kind of contracted. Even by the time we get to like 1st Peter"
    - **Worksheet Materials** - PDF handouts available
    - "I was gonna give you those worksheets, but they won't print with my PDF moving stuff"
    - "I have them as PDFs I can give you"
    - Worksheets are "like 2 pages long" and "fantastic"
- **What is Hermeneutics?** - Defining the term
    - **Student Response** - "Translated, like. Would that be it?"
    - **Imler's Definition** - "How you...build meaning from what you read"
    - "There's a 1000 definitions, right?"
    - **The Key Point** - "You can't not do it anytime you read anything" *[Argument: ARG-06]*
    - "Anytime you make sense of something, you're doing hermeneutics"
- **Positionality Statement** - Imler's acknowledgment of limits
    - "I as a...white cis dude...who's heterosexual...I'm talking about a lot of stuff outside my wheelhouse"
    - "And quite a bit outside my wheelhouse"
    - "So...I'm just introducing this scholarship of other people to look at and voices to look at"
- **The Diagram Structure** - Interconnected bubbles, not linear steps
    - "This is a recreation, this chart is"
    - "It's designed to show you how interconnected these things are that one just does"
    - "It not just a straight line process"

Movement 1: Hermeneutics of Experience

- **Starting with Lived Reality** - "Begin with your experiences"
    - **The Grounds** - "You guys are living humans in the world, right?"
    - "You experience life and like if you see fire in front of you, how do you... say that's not there?"
    - **Where Awareness Begins** - "That's where often the waking up begins"

    - "Either by listening to other people's experiences"
    - "Or taking a time and believing yourself and yours"
- **No Pure Experience** - Always culturally mediated
    - "There is no pure experience, always comes through culture, language"
    - "The personal is political"
- **Student Insight: Good Fruit Criteria** - Critical moment in discussion *[Argument: ARG-07]*
    - **The Question Chain** - Student working through implications
    - Started with "who we are, and then what was it? Who am I? and what do I do with myself?"
    - Considered "begin with your experience, and...this whole thing being a... discernment for life"
    - **Biblical Criterion Remembered** - "Jesus saying...you'll know them by their fruit"
    - "And like in place in the Bible, like what's identified as good fruit"
    - "They will know [you're mine] by how you love one another"
    - **The Critical Insight** - What have we been told is bad fruit that's actually good?
    - "What have we...written off or prejudged because we've been told this isn't good fruit"
    - "But if we're going by our experience...imagine...being able to...with clear eyes look at"
    - "What actually is? What actually is good, good fruit. And what actually is good for you...good for others"
    - **Imler's Validation** - This is exactly the point

Movement 2: Hermeneutics of Domination and Social Location

- **Reading Power Structures** - Understanding social positioning
    - "There is this reading of domination and social location"
    - "And here's where privilege talk is really interesting and important"
- **Two Directions of Privilege Analysis** - Looking up and down
    - **Looking Down** - From position of privilege
    - "Those who have the privilege is unearned. And then the question is, what do I do?"

- "What do I do with this? What am I able to do?"
- **Looking Up** - From position of domination
- "If you are a dominated person, however that's described"
- "If you're in some kind of...permanent hierarchy, that's always extracting stuff from you"
- "What do you do with that? How do you understand that?"
- "Do you understand that as something natural?"

Movement 3: Hermeneutics of Suspicion

- **The Central Question** - Who speaks and why?
  - "At least in my...abstract mind, this comes into power"
  - "Who is speaking to whom? And for what ends?"
  - "And again, it might not be nefarious ends. It just might be, and I'm not thinking about you and your concerns"
- **Andro-Kyriocentric Texts** - Recognizing the perspective
  - "These biblical texts are...andro curiocentric"
  - "That notion of...patriarchy, colonialism, feminism...all of those things together, all at once in different ways"
- **The Language Problem** - Even good intent faces limits *[Argument: ARG-08]*
  - **Women's Conversion Example** - How do you describe what has no language?
  - "So even if they are wanting to describe a place of radical inclusion, do they have the language to describe that?"
  - **Roman Body Construction** - Binary thinking limitations
  - "If you think of women as primarily...built in a certain way"
  - "If this is how you construct man and woman, and you construct female as not male"
  - "You have no other space, right? But also it feels comfortable because I am not that, so I know what I am"
  - **Conversion Language Crisis** - "If this is how you think of things...how does a woman convert? What language do you even have?"
- **Acts of Thomas and Thecla Example** - Describing the indescribable
  - **The Greco-Roman Swoon** - Only available metaphor
  - "In both times, they are described as just falling an absolute lust love"

    - "It's called the Greco-Roman Swoon, in fact"
    - Description: "His face and something swelled in her breast and she kisses his fetters"
    - **What's Actually Happening** - Religious experience, not romance
    - "There's nothing romantic, sexual, attractive at all going on"
    - "And these women become amazing leaders, right?"
    - "But they don't have a way to describe it"
    - **Dating Question** - "Was it more...it was just super late. And legendary"
    - "It just made 100 years after the acts of the other acts"

Movement 4: Hermeneutics of Critical Evaluation

- **Assessing Ideological Impact** - What does submission to text do?
    - "Assessing the impact of the ideology of the text"
    - "What does the text do to you? If you submit to its vision of the world"
- **Scripture as Site of Struggle** - Not rulebook
    - "Scripture becomes a site of struggle, which is kind of cool in a certain way"
    - "Like I wrestle with this, trying to figure things out"
    - "It becomes inspiration rather than a rule book in new situations"
- **Questions of Authority** - Multiple approaches to biblical authority
    - "You got a lot of questions of obedience, authority, interpretation, all of these things"

Movement 5: Hermeneutics of Creative Imagination

- **Moving Beyond Deconstruction** - "What do you do after the hermeneutics of suspicion?"
    - "Because so far we've talked about just shredding things apart and noticing all of this stuff"
- **What Else Is Possible?** - Envisioning alternatives
    - "With that creative imagination, it's really dangerous. Because you can just remake social structures"
    - "And you can just remake bad ones"
- **Example Worksheet: Walking with Mary Magdalene** - Imaginative exercise

    - "If we had 2 more hours, we would literally do a worksheet where we imagine walking with Mary Magdala on the road"
    - "And then having to ask her a question in context"
    - "If you just even put yourself in that situation, you start to imagine"
    - "What else can I imagine, right? What else might be going on?"

Movement 6: Hermeneutics of Re-remembering and Reconstruction

- **The Risk** - Can recreate oppression
    - "You can just remake social structures. And you can just remake bad ones"
- **Paulo Freire's Challenge** - Full humanization, not role reversal
    - **Context** - "Poor communist, Brazilian, indigenous educator"
    - "Writing in the 60s in Brazil. Military junta and all that"
    - **The Task** - "Not only...is the task of...the people below"
    - "It's to humanize themselves. And then to even humanize the oppressors"
    - "Versus to just flip the script and say, you guys are the evil ones, not us"
    - "And to...just invert the relationship"
    - **The Goal** - "The challenge is full humanization"
    - **The Source** - "The thought is that it comes best from below"
    - "That's where people can see the brokenness the most because...they got to deal with it"
    - "And then they can imagine better possibilities"
- **Critical Scholarship Still Needed** - Can't just imagine anything
    - "You still have to...keep all this scholarship and critical stuff in mind, or you might just recreate it"
- **Listening to Voices from Below** - Where reconstruction starts
    - "You're listening to those voices from below and then...doing stuff with it"
    - "Not just staying in a...place of deconstruction where all you can see is how things can further fall apart"
    - "That's helpful and needed. But then you have to live a life and you have to construct stuff in order to do that"

Movement 7: Hermeneutics of Transformative Action

- **The Endpoint** - Not just understanding but change
  - Implied throughout as goal of entire process
  - Connected to ekklesia concept [discussed earlier]

The Hidden Transcript Framework (James c. Scott)

- **Understanding Power Relations** - Public vs. private discourse
  - **Public Transcript** - "What's okay to perform, say...demonstrate publicly"
  - "All the things that are okay"
  - Example: "If I showed up here naked, you guys would be kind of like, what's going on, right?"
  - **Hidden Transcript of the Powerful** - "Stuff we do behind closed doors"
  - "There's the stuff that people empower do behind closed doors, that they don't...that would be weird if they wanted around us"
  - **Hidden Transcript of the Marginalized** - "Marginalized communities have those too"
  - "As every one who's a part of those...intimately knows"
  - "You have to in order to remain yourself. If you can't be yourself out public"
  - "You need those spaces, you need those cultural technologies, whatever"
- **Application to Early Christianity** - Secret gatherings
  - "This is...why Christians were meeting behind closed doors"
  - "And the time that they caught those women's slave leaders, and they said they were meeting behind closed doors"
- **Nested Structures** - Hierarchies within hierarchies
  - "It's the same process replicated...what are the Baptist leaders saying versus what are the Baptist people doing?"
  - "And like, what are the women in that group saying?"
  - "You just keep making these nested things"
- **Reading for Hidden Transcripts** - What's underneath the text?
  - "An interesting question is...there's the text. What's on top?"
  - "And then, is there anything else about the community or what's going on or even theology that we can...tease out?"
  - "By...reading it in a way that was different than that...hermeneutical spiral thing"

Contemporary Political Application Discussion

- **Student Observation: Political Reconstruction Failure** - Stuck in deconstruction
  - "Just thinking about...our political mess right now, but we're kind of stuck in that falling apart"
  - "Like, we need a voice of reconstruction. So, like, there isn't worse on either side"
  - "It is all doing blue. It is all chaos. It's all...right, you're right"
  - "Like, there is no reimagining of how"
- **Hope in Youth** - Next generation possibilities
  - "When I hang out with my kids, because I teach high school, like, they are so...it gives me so much hope"
  - "They have that ability and they have that...vision of...this is all crap. Let's throw it out and...reconstruct the world"
  - "The way they interact and the way that they...take care of each other, the way that they take care of us"
- **The Cycle Problem** - System co-opts resisters
  - "There is a population of my kids when I started that could be coming into some of these power places"
  - "So like, how, what happens to them? From where I see them and have so much hope"
  - "Then we get to a place where this is just perpetually a miscycle"
  - Student: "What...opinion and trauma?"
  - "How do we, as...the elders, encourage that to stay who they are?"
  - "So that when they get into positions and power, they can make those [changes]"
- **Disability Mundus Concept** - Design from margins
  - "Who's best position to design adjust world?"
  - "Well, the people for whom it's not designed right now. That's just it in a nutshell"
- **Presidential Leadership Gap Example** - Missing basic reconciliation
  - Student observation: "Usually once a president is...there seems to be this idea that...I'm the president of all the people"
  - "It doesn't, it feels like that's a little bit lacking...it's a lot laughing"

    - "That gap is why we needed more because we don't even have the top 1st of going"
    - "'Yes, I would, yes, I'm a Republican, and yes, I was like Chinese people. But I'm now the president of all'"
    - "If we're missing that, is there a way that our download here, that excluded?"
- **The Wedge Strategy** - Biola University's tactical polarization
    - **Historical Context** - "Biola University...in the 80s and 90s developed the wedge strategy"
    - "Yeah, and it's being used to great effect"
    - **The Method** - "Trying to...worm their way back into society. Cultural places"
    - "And then find something...in my hometown case, it was abortion, right?"
    - "If I can get everyone to divide on that, well, then what else can go on here?"
    - "And then I peel away on the next thing and I peel away on the next thing"
    - **The Document** - "I have it...these people...know, and this is...5 years ago, he was like, this is what we're gonna do"
    - "Came out and said it, and then we're living it now"
    - **The Goal** - "Have the public reading something crazy in the newspaper and think critical race theory"
    - "And then we've done it...automatically just...and as soon as you have that, and then you add DEI, and then you add this"
- **The Tactical Dilemma** - How to respond? *(Discussion, not resolved argument)*
    - **The Question** - "Do you do we play into this?"
    - "Do we do the other side of like, no...there are people threatened. We don't want them harmed. We are saying no"
    - "Does that...not magnify and spiral?"
    - **The Difference** - "Here's the line, here's the web"
    - **Humanization Question** - "How do you undo that? By humanizing, by..."
    - "If they're not inherently people, these others. But if they're still doing messed up stuff?"
- **Sister's In-Laws Example** - Micro-focus problem

    - "My sister's in-laws are not thinking, I'm going to disenfranchise all of these people"
    - "They're very micro focused on the thing that is in their real house"
    - "But when I...dehumanize them or when I made them the bad guy because they voted for Trump"
    - "Now all of a sudden, I'm feeding right into this narrative"
    - "But at the same time, they're doing that"
    - Student: "People get one issue voters, not just that, but they look at the Bible and this is abortion. I'm voting for this judge. We ain't gonna look at numbers five"
    - "I think he's morally wrong. I'm gonna vote for him just for that"
- **Starting from the Ground** - Alternative approach
    - "Think about what Elizabeth...proposes, beginning from the ground"
    - "There's a hell lot of people that the society's grounding down"
    - "Maybe that is where you begin without reference to these divisions"
    - "Beginning to ask other questions. And maybe that can reconfigure things from the bottom up"
- **Zapatista Example** - Successful ground-up organizing
    - **Context** - "Terrorist group failing"
    - "Didn't overthrow the Mexican government down"
    - **Strategy Shift** - "They called a draw, but they went back into literally the Laconian jungle"
    - "And they started asking indigenous groups...hey...how do we build a big other?"
    - **The Process** - "How are you suffering? What's shitty about you? Who's hurting you?"
    - "You guys have had a whole decade of...problems, but like, what are your common progress?"
    - **Discovery** - "They were like, oh shit, it's neoliberalism, patriarchy, and the state"
    - "And so then they know what to push against"
- **The Authority Problem** - Leadership becomes oppression
    - "It doesn't feel like the authority...if someone gets in charge...they get a power"

    - "State communism. State campus, Stalin. You just was a bowling. You just cut everybody out that didn't agree with them"
    - "It seems like that, at least with the church, because it was the Roman Catholics only for diamonds"
    - "And they just did what they wanted to, whoever was in charge"
    - Imler: "Maybe we need to not have leaders"
    - Student: "My parents are Plymouth's brother"
    - Imler: "You even see that in kind of 1st Corinthians"

Empathy and Moral Certainty Discussion

- **Nobody Thinks They're Evil** - Universal self-justification
    - Student: "Several weeks ago when you were in class...every nobody thinks that they're...on the side of [evil]"
    - "Everybody thinks they're doing good for good reasons and have their... reasons why"
    - "And don't necessarily see the harm that they're doing"
    - "Was that U word? They think...empathy"
    - "Everybody thinks they're good doing...nobody is going to look at themselves and go, oh, I'm doing this evil thing"
    - "People like twisting their mustache. They're, they really believe in this"
    - "They think this is wrong and it doesn't mean that they don't know that their marginalizing other people"
- **The Anti-Abortion Inconsistency** - "Big inconsistency here"
    - "They're anti-abortion, but then they're pro [death penalty]"

The Numbers 5 Problem: Biblical Abortion Text

- **Three Sets of Passages** - Different biblical treatments
    - "You got 3 sets of passages that kind of deal with this"
    - "Numbers five, stuff in Exodus, and...the poetry passages"
- **Poetry Passages** - Suggest importance of fetus
    - "I read the poetry passages. Seems like something's really important going on"
- **Law Passages** - Suggest lesser status

  - "I read...the law cases, and it seems like something's important, but not the same as an adult human life"
  - "Like, legally, principally"
  - "What else you got besides reason and laws there?"
- **Numbers 5: The Ordeal of Bitter Water** - Forced abortion ritual
  - **The Social Problem** - Community survival threatened
  - "An ancient desert society about to fall apart. Everyone's about to starve"
  - "What happens if one dude, who's a major person in the family...thinks his male competitor has gotten his wife pregnant?"
  - "If you don't solve that, you're gonna have a community that falls apart"
  - **The Evidence Problem** - "There's no evidence in this case"
  - "So how do you solve that when there's no evidence?"
  - **The "Solution"** - Sympathetic magic ritual
  - "They move into sympathetic magic in a very patriarchal way"
  - "This is where I hate talking about it, but it's there"
  - **The Ritual Process** - Degradation and divination
  - "They disheveled the woman's hair"
  - "No evidence, just got a jealous man, if you've ever seen an insecure jealous man"
  - "They dragged the woman into the temple, dishevel her hair"
  - "Make her speak curses over herself, if I've done this"
  - "Then they take dirt from the temple floor, put it in [water]"
  - "They write her possible offense. They put it in the water, the ink dissolves, they mix it up"
  - "Don't know what else is in there"
  - "They force her to drink it while forcing her to say, if I have...been unfaithful, may I have a miscarriage and become infertile"
  - **The Outcome** - Divine judgment by ordeal
  - "So they make the her drink the water and then God decides what happens"
  - "The community's like, I don't know what happened. We got to solve it, so we're gonna give it up to God and let him through this divination"
  - **What About the Man?** - Asymmetric accountability
  - Student question: "What about the band?"

    - "He has to just listen. He's already noticed. He's drug her in front of the violent authorities"
    - **Is She Pregnant?** - Student confusion
    - "I...it's another game, pregnant"
    - "There's no, he doesn't know. That's the whole thing. He's just insecure and jealous"
    - **The Abortifacient Nature** - Text explicitly describes miscarriage
    - "The rest of the text says, if she's been unfaithful, she has a discharge"
    - "The text translates it, and her womb drops"
    - "If she's done nothing wrong, nothing happens"
    - "It's like a magical...abortificent...it activates, if she's been unfaithful, it doesn't activate"
    - **Todd Akin Connection** - Same magical thinking in modern politics
    - Student: "The guy in the side...Aiken?"
    - "It's the same thing. If...there was unfaithfulness, then...the body has a way to reject that"
    - "Like, where does that come from? It comes from right there. That is the direct [source]"
    - **Historical Alternative** - Context of ancient practice
    - "At that time, they wouldn't get rid of their wife, they were just picking me, saying she's unbatable, taking her or drowning her"
    - "And so that's why God said, something about you can't do that"
- **Interpretive Challenge** - How to read this text?
    - "That's not a feminist text. It's one that has people doing abortion to other people"
    - "How do you read that?"
- **God's Character Question** - Violence in biblical text
    - "Also, like the passengers where God's like, what if we annihilate everyone in the town? How do you read that?"
    - "This gives you a way of reading it. Other than, well, we have to accept it"
    - Student: "I also think some of the [cultures] probably way worse than what we imagine"
    - "And what was going on there that was worse?"
    - "The Bible's not a history, and it's not a science book. But [some] hand thinks it is"

Bibliography

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler. *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*.

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*.

Glossary

A

Andro-Kyriocentric

- **Shorthand** - Male-master-centered texts
- **Definition in Lecture** - "These biblical texts are...andro curiocentric, but just that notion of...patriarchy, colonialism...all of those things together, all at once in different ways"
- **Popular Usage** - Not used in everyday language
- **Academic Usage** - Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's term combining "andro" (male) with "kyrio" (lord/master) and "centric" (centered on) to describe texts that take elite male experience as the normative human experience; recognizes intersecting oppressions beyond simple patriarchy

C

Coherentism

- **Shorthand** - Web model of knowledge
- **Definition in Lecture** - "What if we think about ideas as points in a web where things connect?...or like, a solar system where like maybe God has...a lot of gravity...and then you have other ideas that work along with it...think of it like a galaxy, like a web, where these ideas interact with one another, and they're mutually supportive"

- **Popular Usage** - Rarely used outside philosophy
- **Academic Usage** - Epistemological theory holding that beliefs are justified by their coherence with other beliefs in a web-like system, rather than by resting on foundational certainties; contrasts with foundationalism; offers resilience because losing one belief doesn't collapse entire system

D

Disability Mundus

- **Shorthand** - Design from the margins
- **Definition in Lecture** - "Who's best position to design adjust world? Well, the people for whom it's not designed right now. That's just it in a nutshell"
- **Popular Usage** - Not commonly used
- **Academic Usage** - Concept in disability studies and critical theory that those excluded from current systems are best positioned to design just alternatives; related to standpoint epistemology and liberation theology's "preferential option for the poor"

E

Ekklesia

- **Shorthand** - Democratic assembly
- **Definition in Lecture** - Referenced earlier in course; connected to Schüssler Fiorenza's concept of "discipleship of equals"
- **Popular Usage** - Sometimes used in church contexts to mean "church"
- **Academic Usage** - Greek term for democratic assembly of citizens; Schüssler Fiorenza reclaims it to envision early Christian communities as egalitarian gatherings rather than hierarchical institutions; "ekklesia of wo/men" as radical democratic space

ESV (English Standard Version)

- **Shorthand** - Gender-specific Bible translation
- **Definition in Lecture** - "The crossing won't shut up about the ESV. Well, that was specifically made to erase the gender neutrality of that Bible...like Wayne

Grudem...explicitly said it, that we want to do"

- **Popular Usage** - Widely used in conservative evangelical churches as "literal" translation
- **Academic Usage** - 2001 Bible translation explicitly created to remove gender-inclusive language from previous translations; represents theological agenda of complementarianism embedded in translation choices; demonstrates that all translation involves interpretation

Eternal Functional Subordination (EFS)

- **Shorthand** - Jesus eternally submits to Father
- **Definition in Lecture** - Wayne Grudem "redefined the Trinity to subsume the Jesus under the sun and eternal submission, which is like a long-standing heresy, so that there's not equality in the trinity. So that, there's not equality between humans"
- **Popular Usage** - Not known outside theology circles
- **Academic Usage** - Controversial doctrine taught by some complementarians claiming Jesus is eternally subordinate in function (though equal in essence) to the Father; used to justify male headship and female submission; considered heretical by many theologians because it compromises Trinitarian equality and revives ancient Arianism

F

Foundationalism

- **Shorthand** - Brick wall model
- **Definition in Lecture** - "I can build a solid way of seeing the world...if I begin with one good, solid brick, put it on a good, sound foundation, put a good brick next to it, and if I'm a good builder...I can build a whole institution of knowledge and theology, and it should be true"
- **Popular Usage** - Not used in everyday speech
- **Academic Usage** - Epistemological theory holding that knowledge must rest on indubitable foundations (basic beliefs) from which other beliefs are derived; offers certainty but creates fragility—if foundation cracks, entire system collapses; common in conservative theology claiming to build from "clear" biblical statements

G

Greco-Roman Swoon

- **Shorthand** - Falling in love description
- **Definition in Lecture** - "In both times, they are described as just falling an absolute lust love. It's called the Greco-Roman Swoon, in fact...his face and something swelled in her breast and she kisses his fetters. There's nothing romantic, sexual, attractive at all going on, and these women become amazing leaders, right? But they don't have a way to describe it"
- **Popular Usage** - Not used
- **Academic Usage** - Literary convention in ancient texts where religious conversion or philosophical awakening is described using erotic language because no other vocabulary existed to express intense spiritual experience; found in Acts of Thomas and Acts of Thecla; demonstrates how language limitations shape what can be expressed

H

Hermeneutics

- **Shorthand** - Interpretation theory
- **Definition in Lecture** - "How you...build meaning from what you read. There's a 1000 definitions, right? But it's just...you can't not do it anytime you read anything. Anytime you make sense of something, you're doing hermeneutics"
- **Popular Usage** - Rarely used; when used, often means "how to interpret the Bible"
- **Academic Usage** - Theory and practice of interpretation; study of the principles, methods, and presuppositions involved in making meaning from texts; everyone practices hermeneutics whether conscious of it or not; feminist hermeneutics makes interpretive frameworks explicit rather than claiming "just to read" the text

Hermeneutical Spiral

- **Shorthand** - Conservative interpretation method

- **Definition in Lecture** - Method Imler learned at Asbury Seminary; "begin with the smallest unit...usually a verse...the meaning is there, and then they have to find it...that means that there's just one meaning down that you have to dig out"; examines verse, then paragraph, then book, then whole Bible
- **Popular Usage** - Unknown outside biblical studies
- **Academic Usage** - Interpretation method assuming single correct meaning exists in text that can be discovered through careful analysis; moves from small textual units to larger contexts; tends toward proof-texting and "thin wall" construction; contrasts with methods acknowledging multiple valid readings and reader's role in meaning-making

Hidden Transcript

- **Shorthand** - Private resistance language
- **Definition in Lecture** - James C. Scott's model distinguishing "what subordinated people say in view of power" [public transcript] from "what subordinated people say among themselves" [hidden transcript]; "marginalized communities have those too...you have to in order to remain yourself. If you can't be yourself out public, you need those spaces"
- **Popular Usage** - Not used in everyday language
- **Academic Usage** - James C. Scott's framework from *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*; analyzes how oppressed groups maintain public compliance while developing alternative values, practices, and critiques in private spaces; explains how early Christians practiced radical equality in private gatherings while maintaining public conformity to Roman social order

K

Kyriarchy

- **Shorthand** - Pyramid of domination
- **Definition in Lecture** - Referenced but not explicitly defined; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's term for intersecting systems of domination
- **Popular Usage** - Increasingly used in progressive activist circles
- **Academic Usage** - Fiorenza's term from Greek "kyrios" [lord/master] and "archein" [to rule]; describes pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative oppressions including but not limited to patriarchy; recognizes that gender,

race, class, sexuality, religion, and other factors create complex matrices of domination rather than single axis of oppression

N

Numbers 5 (Ordeal of Bitter Water)

- **Shorthand** - Biblical abortion ritual
- **Definition in Lecture** - "Ancient desert society about to fall apart...what happens if one dude...thinks his male competitor has gotten his wife pregnant?...there's no evidence...so they move into sympathetic magic...they disheveled the woman's hair, make her speak curses over herself...force her to drink [bitter water]...if she's been unfaithful, she has a discharge...her womb drops. If she's done nothing wrong, nothing happens"
- **Popular Usage** - Rarely discussed; when mentioned, often explained away
- **Academic Usage** - Numbers 5:11-31; ancient ordeal ritual for suspected adultery; woman forced to drink mixture of temple floor dust, ink from written curses, and water; text describes miscarriage as outcome for guilty woman; demonstrates biblical text contains forced abortion; challenges simplistic "Bible opposes abortion" claims; shows patriarchal control of women's bodies and reproduction; related to Todd Akin's "legitimate rape" comments which echo magical thinking that women's bodies prevent pregnancy from "real" violation

P

Public Transcript

- **Shorthand** - Visible compliance
- **Definition in Lecture** - "What's okay to perform, say...demonstrate publicly...all the things that are okay"; contrasts with hidden transcript where real opinions and resistance live
- **Popular Usage** - Not used outside academic contexts
- **Academic Usage** - James C. Scott's term for discourse that takes place in view of power relations; what subordinated people say and do when dominant groups are watching; includes both elite's self-presentation and subordinates'

strategic compliance; understanding public/hidden transcript distinction reveals how biblical texts may contain coded resistance to Roman power

S

Sympathetic Magic

- **Shorthand** - Like affects like
- **Definition in Lecture** - Used to describe Numbers 5 ritual: "they write her possible offense. They put it in the water, the ink dissolves, they mix it up... force her to drink it...and then God decides what happens...we're gonna give it up to God and let him through this divination"
- **Popular Usage** - Sometimes used to describe superstitious practices
- **Academic Usage** - Anthropological term for magical thinking where symbolic actions are believed to affect reality [writing curse, dissolving in water, drinking mixture transfers curse to body]; found in many ancient cultures including biblical Israel; Numbers 5 combines sympathetic magic with ordeal by divine judgment; reveals ancient worldview incompatible with modern science

W

Wedge Strategy

- **Shorthand** - Tactical polarization
- **Definition in Lecture** - "Biola University...in the 80s and 90s developed the wedge strategy...trying to worm their way back into society, cultural places, and then find something...in my hometown case, it was abortion...if I can get everyone to divide on that, well, then what else can go on here? And then I peel away on the next thing"; goal is "have the public reading something crazy in the newspaper and think critical race theory. And then we've done it"
- **Popular Usage** - Sometimes referenced in discussions of culture wars
- **Academic Usage** - Originally developed at Biola University; systematic strategy to reclaim cultural power by identifying wedge issues that divide populations, then using those divisions to advance broader agenda; explicitly documented in "Wedge Document"; creates cascade of polarization where terms like "CRT,"

"DEI," "woke" trigger automatic negative response; demonstrates conscious manipulation of language and framing to achieve political ends

Wo/men

- **Shorthand** - Inclusive gender term
- **Definition in Lecture** - Used throughout Schüssler Fiorenza's work but not explicitly defined in lecture
- **Popular Usage** - Not used in everyday language
- **Academic Usage** - Schüssler Fiorenza's notation that breaks apart "women" to indicate internal diversity and refuse essentialist definitions; slash indicates category is constructed and contested; includes all marginalized by kyriarchy regardless of biological sex; reminds readers that "women's experience" is not monolithic but shaped by race, class, sexuality, culture, religion, etc.

Z

Zapatista Movement

- **Shorthand** - Bottom-up organizing model
- **Definition in Lecture** - "Terrorist group failing. Didn't overthrow the Mexican government...they called a draw, but they went back into literally the Laconian jungle, and they started asking indigenous groups...how are you suffering? What's shitty about you? Who's hurting you?...they were like, oh shit, it's neoliberalism, patriarchy, and the state. And so then they know what to push against"
- **Popular Usage** - Sometimes referenced in activist circles
- **Academic Usage** - Zapatista National Liberation Army [EZLN]; indigenous movement in Chiapas, Mexico that shifted from armed revolution to community organizing; demonstrates successful ground-up coalition building by identifying common oppressions across diverse groups rather than imposing top-down ideology; influenced by Paulo Freire's pedagogy; model for liberation movements that avoid recreating hierarchies they oppose

Arguments

Argument Identification Summary

Arguments Found: 8
Sources Referenced: 4
Claims Requiring Review: 6

Table of Arguments

URI	Shorthand	Type	Form	Valid/Strong	Review Status
ARG-01	ESV Agenda	Historical	Modus Ponens	Valid	Needs source verification
ARG-02	Foundationalism Anxiety	Comparative	Analogy	Strong	Complete
ARG-03	Web Model Resilience	Comparative	Contrast	Strong	Complete
ARG-04	Spiral Method Weakness	Critical	Consequence	Valid	Complete
ARG-05	Proof-Texting Problem	Inductive	Pattern	Strong	Complete
ARG-06	Hermeneutics Unavoidable	Deductive	Universal	Valid	Complete
ARG-07	Good Fruit Criterion	Evaluative	Biblical	Sound	Complete
ARG-08	Language Limits Theology	Inductive	Historical	Strong	Complete

Arguments Analysis

ARG-01: ESV Translation Has Political Agenda

URI: ARG-01
Type: Deductive
Form: Modus Ponens
Valid/Strong: Valid

Context: Discussion of local church's [the Crossing] promotion of ESV translation as "best" or "most literal"; Imler explaining why translation debates matter

Standard Form:

1. If a translation was explicitly created to advance a theological agenda, then it is not neutral or "just literal."
2. The ESV was explicitly created by Wayne Grudem and others to remove gender-neutral language and advance complementarian theology.
3. Wayne Grudem stated this goal publicly.

Therefore: The ESV is not a neutral or "just literal" translation but advances a specific theological-political agenda.

Analysis:

- **Indicator Words:** "Well, that was specifically made to" [premise indicator]; implicit conclusion
- **Enthymeme:** Premise 1 is unstated but necessary
- **Validity/Strength:** Valid - if premises true, conclusion must follow
- **Soundness:** Premise 2 requires historical verification of Grudem's statements; Premise 3 needs source documentation
- **Principle of Charity Applied:** Interprets Imler's fragmented statement as complete argument
- **Plain Language:** Technical terms [complementarianism, inerrancy] explained in context

Claims Requiring Verification:

- Wayne Grudem's explicit statements about ESV translation goals
- ESV translation committee membership and stated purposes
- Comparison of ESV with source texts on gender-neutral passages

---

ARG-02: Foundationalism Creates Existential Anxiety

URI: ARG-02
Type: Inductive
Form: Causal Analogy
Valid/Strong: Strong

Context: Explaining why people resist alternative interpretive methods; understanding conservative evangelical psychology

Standard Form:

1. Foundationalist epistemology structures knowledge as a brick wall built on solid foundation.
2. In brick wall structures, any crack threatens entire edifice.
3. Identity questions (who am I? what should I do?) sit at center of theological brick walls.
4. If theological foundation cracks, it can collapse entire sense of self and purpose.

Therefore: Foundationalism creates intense anxiety about questioning any belief, because questioning threatens total collapse.

Analysis:

- **Indicator Words:** "And so" (conclusion indicator); "if" (conditional premise)
- **Enthymeme:** Connection between epistemology and psychology somewhat implicit
- **Validity/Strength:** Strong inductive argument from analogy and observed patterns
- **Soundness:** Premises 1-3 accurately describe foundationalist thinking; Premise 4 supported by deconstruction testimonies
- **Principle of Charity Applied:** Draws out implicit psychological dimension of epistemological choice
- **Plain Language:** "Brick wall" metaphor effective; "existential anxiety" clearer than "anxiety of foundationalism"

ARG-03: Web Model Provides Resilience

URI: ARG-03
Type: Inductive
Form: Comparative Analogy
Valid/Strong: Strong

Context: Contrasting coherentist epistemology with foundationalism; showing benefits of alternative model

Standard Form:

1. In web/network epistemologies, beliefs support each other through multiple connections.
2. Loss of one belief doesn't sever all connections.
3. System can rebalance and maintain overall coherence despite local changes.

Therefore: Web models provide resilience against challenges that would collapse foundationalist systems.

Analysis:

- **Indicator Words:** "Instead" [contrast]; "so" [conclusion indicator in student comment]
- **Enthymeme:** Comparison to foundationalism implied rather than stated
- **Validity/Strength:** Strong argument from analogy and structural comparison
- **Soundness:** Premises supported by epistemology literature and observed patterns in belief change
- **Principle of Charity Applied:** Synthesizes Imler's scattered comments into coherent comparison
- **Plain Language:** "Web," "solar system," "galaxy" metaphors work well; avoided technical philosophical terminology

---

ARG-04: Hermeneutical Spiral Method Builds Thin Walls

URI: ARG-04
Type: Deductive
Form: Consequence Argument
Valid/Strong: Valid

Context: Criticizing conservative evangelical interpretation method Imler learned at Asbury Seminary

Standard Form:

1. The hermeneutical spiral method assumes single correct meaning exists in text.
2. Single-meaning assumption requires building from smallest units (verses) upward.
3. Building from verses upward creates narrow interpretive pathways.
4. Narrow pathways create fragile theological structures ("thin walls").

Therefore: The hermeneutical spiral method, despite claiming to build carefully, creates fragile theology vulnerable to contradiction.

Analysis:

- **Indicator Words:** "And so" (conclusion indicator); "because" (reason indicator)
- **Enthymeme:** Connection between single meaning and fragility somewhat implicit
- **Validity/Strength:** Valid - conclusion follows from premises
- **Soundness:** Premises 1-2 accurately describe method; Premises 3-4 are critical claims requiring support from examples
- **Principle of Charity Applied:** Reconstructs Imler's implied criticism into explicit logical form
- **Plain Language:** "Thin walls" metaphor effective; "narrow interpretive pathways" clearer than technical description

Connection to ARG-02: This argument explains *how* foundationalism (ARG-02) operates in biblical interpretation specifically

---

ARG-05: Proof-Texting Exemplifies Spiral Method Problems

URI: ARG-05
Type: Inductive
Form: Example Pattern
Valid/Strong: Strong

Context: Student sharing experience of being told to "turn the other cheek" without explanation of context; illustrating ARG-04

Standard Form:

1. Conservative method takes individual verses as self-explanatory units.
2. Verses are combined without attention to context or interconnection.
3. Student example: "turn the other cheek" applied to children without explaining what it means.
4. This pattern repeats across different verses and situations.

Therefore: The hermeneutical spiral method in practice reduces to proof-texting that combines decontextualized verses.

Analysis:

- **Indicator Words:** "And so when you do that" [consequence]; "because" [reason]
- **Enthymeme:** Assumption that this example represents broader pattern
- **Validity/Strength:** Strong inductive argument from representative example
- **Soundness:** Example verifiable from student experience; pattern recognition requires multiple confirming instances
- **Principle of Charity Applied:** Takes student's fragmentary comment and shows its argumentative force
- **Plain Language:** "Proof-texting" explained through concrete example rather than technical definition

Connection to ARG-04: Provides empirical evidence for theoretical criticism

---

ARG-06: Hermeneutics Is Unavoidable

URI: ARG-06
Type: Deductive
Form: Universal Claim
Valid/Strong: Valid

Context: Defining hermeneutics for students; establishing that everyone interprets whether they admit it or not

Standard Form:

1. Hermeneutics is the process of making meaning from texts.
2. Anytime anyone reads anything, they make meaning.

3. Making meaning is the same process as hermeneutics [by definition].

Therefore: Anytime anyone reads anything, they are doing hermeneutics.

Analysis:

- **Indicator Words:** "Right? But it's just" [premise indicator]; implicit conclusion
- **Enthymeme:** None - argument is explicit
- **Validity/Strong:** Valid by definition - conclusion is tautological given premises
- **Soundness:** Sound - premises are true by definition of terms
- **Principle of Charity Applied:** Minimal reconstruction needed; clear statement
- **Plain Language:** Already in plain language; "making meaning" clearer than "interpretation"

Implications: If hermeneutics is unavoidable, claims to "just read the Bible" are either self-deceptive or dishonest

---

ARG-07: Good Fruit Provides Evaluative Criterion

URI: ARG-07
Type: Deductive
Form: Biblical Warrant
Valid/Strong: Sound

Context: Student insight during discussion of hermeneutics of experience; connecting feminist method to biblical criteria

Standard Form:

1. Jesus said "you'll know them by their fruit" [Matthew 7:16-20].
2. Biblical texts identify good fruit as loving one another [John 13:35].
3. We should evaluate theological claims and interpretations by whether they produce good fruit.
4. Good fruit means actual benefit to real people, not conformity to inherited categories.

Therefore: We can use good fruit criterion to evaluate which interpretations and which aspects of our tradition are actually good, questioning what we've been told

is bad fruit but our experience shows is good.

Analysis:

- **Indicator Words:** "And like" [connection]; "and just like" [parallel structure]
- **Enthymeme:** Premise 4 is implicit but necessary to complete student's insight
- **Validity/Strength:** Valid - conclusion follows from premises
- **Soundness:** Sound - premises are biblically grounded and experientially verifiable
- **Principle of Charity Applied:** Reconstructs student's exploratory comments into complete argument
- **Plain Language:** "Good fruit" already plain; "actual benefit" clearer than abstract theological language

Implications: This argument shows how feminist hermeneutics of experience can be grounded in biblical warrants, not just secular philosophy

Connection to Broader Discussion: This was a breakthrough moment in class where student connected abstract methodology to concrete biblical criterion

---

ARG-08: Language Limits Shape Theological Expression

URI: ARG-08
Type: Inductive
Form: Historical Evidence
Valid/Strong: Strong

Context: Discussing hermeneutics of suspicion; explaining why ancient texts might not express egalitarian reality even if it existed

Standard Form:

1. Greco-Roman culture constructed gender as binary: male/not-male.
2. Religious conversion and leadership required description.
3. Available language for intense experience was limited to erotic/romantic vocabulary [Greco-Roman Swoon].
4. Acts of Thomas and Acts of Thecla describe women's leadership using romantic language not because relationships were romantic, but because no other

vocabulary existed.

Therefore: Even communities practicing radical inclusion might not be able to describe that inclusion clearly because linguistic categories shape what can be expressed.

Analysis:

- **Indicator Words:** "So even if" [conditional premise]; "but" [contrast indicating limitation]
- **Enthymeme:** Connection between language and conceptual categories implied
- **Validity/Strength:** Strong inductive argument from historical linguistics and textual evidence
- **Soundness:** Premises 1-3 supported by classical studies; Premise 4 requires textual analysis of apocryphal acts
- **Principle of Charity Applied:** Synthesizes Imler's example into general principle about language and theology
- **Plain Language:** "Language limits" clearer than "linguistic determinism"; concrete example makes abstract point accessible

Implications:

- Helps explain why biblical texts might not explicitly affirm contemporary values even if early communities practiced them
- Justifies hermeneutics of suspicion and creative imagination to read "against the grain"
- Shows why simply quoting Bible verses can't settle interpretive questions

Claims Requiring Verification:

- Dating and content of Acts of Thomas and Acts of Thecla
- Scholarly consensus on "Greco-Roman Swoon" as literary convention
- Analysis of gender construction in Greco-Roman culture

LEC_ARCV-MMMM_Bible-WK-06-Towards a Critical Feminist Hermeneutics of Liberation

Metadata

- Professor Imler
- "Towards a Critical Feminist Hermeneutics of Liberation"
- MMMM, the Bible, Week 06
- 2025-10-19
- #feminist-hermeneutics #biblical-interpretation #schussler-fiorenza #foundationalism #coherentism #hermeneutical-spiral

---

Opening and Context

We are reaching a point in the class where wrapping things up is difficult. It is hard to know exactly how to finish well. In a few weeks, we will do a session on translation issues, looking specifically at different translations people in this town use.

The Crossing, for example, will not stop talking about the ESV. The ESV was specifically made to erase the gender neutrality that existed in previous Bible translations. Wayne Grudem, who I would love to put mashed potatoes in his lawn, explicitly said this was the goal. Grudem did more than just oversee a translation—he redefined the Trinity itself. He created what theologians call Eternal Functional Subordination, arguing that Jesus is eternally subordinate in function to the Father, though equal in essence. This is a long-standing heresy because it destroys equality within the Trinity. It recreates what ancient councils condemned as Arianism, the idea that Jesus is somehow less than the Father.

The purpose was clear and strategic: if there is no equality in the Trinity, then there is no equality between humans. Grudem creates hierarchy in the Godhead so that he can justify hierarchy between men and women, husbands and wives. This is what we are really up against in this town—not just different reading preferences, but theological moves designed to subordinate certain people. When I say we need at least some mindfulness of this, I mean understanding how to navigate yourself as you encounter texts and your people, and also how to talk with others about these issues.

I grew up being told that everyone who was not my kind of conservative evangelical—not in my stripe—did not believe the Bible, could not believe in Jesus, and therefore could not be saved. If that were true, I understand the anxiety. But we need to ask: Is it true? Is that a good way to frame things?

The anxiety of foundationalism is real, and we need to be honest about it. If we know what might be going on with people, we can have better conversations about Scripture and interpretation. At the center of that foundationalist wall are always questions of identity: Who am I? What should I be doing with myself? There is God, there are others, and so on. When that wall falls apart, you can lose a sense of everything. Everyone goes through this—I am sure you all know better than me. Acknowledging that anxiety helps us understand why alternative interpretive methods meet such resistance.

Foundationalism Creates Existential Anxiety

Foundationalist epistemology structures knowledge like building a brick wall on a solid foundation. You begin with one good, solid brick on a good, sound foundation. If you are a good builder, you put another good brick next to it, and you can build a whole institution of knowledge and theology. It should be true, which is nice.

But if you have a chip in the wall, whether from the top or from the bottom, you start to face threats. From your assumptions about what it means to be human or what the text is, or from experience contradicting the system—like when I was told queer relationships are not possible, yet here they are in the world—cracks appear. From experience or from faulty assumptions, the wall becomes threatening.

The brick wall model creates intense anxiety about questioning any belief because questioning threatens total collapse. In these structures, any crack threatens the entire edifice. Identity questions sit at the center of these theological brick walls. If the theological foundation cracks, it can collapse your entire sense of self and purpose. This is why foundationalism creates such resistance to alternative interpretive methods. People are not just protecting ideas; they are protecting their sense of who they are.

The Web Model Provides Resilience

Instead of thinking about theology as a brick wall, what if we think about ideas as points in a web where things connect? Or like a solar system where God has a lot of gravity, and then you have other ideas that work along with it. Think of it like a galaxy, like a web, where these ideas interact with one another and are mutually supportive.

If one of these beliefs falls apart in a brick wall system, everything goes. The whole thing collapses. But in web or network epistemologies, beliefs support each other through multiple connections. Loss of one belief does not sever all connections. The system can rebalance and maintain overall coherence despite local changes. You have some ability to absorb challenges and still be okay foundationally.

This is not just abstract philosophy. This matters for how we live through theological challenges. If you arrange your theology as mutually supporting ideas rather than stacked bricks, you gain resilience. When one idea changes, the whole system does not have to collapse.

The Hermeneutical Spiral Method Builds Thin Walls

I want to contrast the foundationalist approach with a method I learned at places like Central Christian College and Asbury Seminary. This is the hermeneutical spiral method. I went to Central Christian College, a fundamentalist place north of here. Later, I went to Asbury Seminary for a couple of years. This is what they taught there.

The method begins with the smallest unit you are looking at, usually a verse. Notice that gives away the game that they might be messing up somewhere. They begin with a single sentence or paragraph, and the meaning is there, and they have to find it. That means there is just one meaning that you have to dig out.

They do not start at the top with big questions. They start at the bottom with the text in front of them. That makes sense because it is their text, right? But here is the problem: if you begin with the assumption that there is a single correct meaning in each verse, you must build from those smallest units upward. Building

from verses upward creates narrow interpretive pathways. Those narrow pathways create fragile theological structures—thin walls.

They want to do this well because they care about Scripture. At each stage, they ask: What does the text say? What is the paragraph saying? What is the entire book saying? And then, what does the whole Bible say? They try to show how it all fits together. See, this fits together, and now we can build theology.

But the problem remains: they are building a wall, and they are building a thin wall. The hermeneutical spiral method, despite claiming to build carefully, creates fragile theology vulnerable to contradiction.

Proof-Texting Exemplifies the Problem

We saw how this method works in practice during our discussion. A student shared an experience from childhood: when they got upset about something another kid did, adults would tell them to turn the other cheek. But they never explained what that meant. Then they would combine that verse with another verse without explaining the context.

This is what the spiral method produces in practice. Conservative interpretation takes individual verses as self-explanatory units. Verses get combined without attention to context or interconnection. This pattern repeats across different verses and situations. In practice, the hermeneutical spiral method reduces to proof-texting that combines decontextualized verses. When you take a little piece from here and a little piece from there and put them together, suddenly you have rapture theology or other constructions that depend on ignoring context.

Hermeneutics Is Unavoidable

What do people know about the word hermeneutics? A student said it has to do with translation. That is close. Hermeneutics is how you build meaning from what you read. There are a thousand definitions, but it is building meaning from what you encounter.

Here is the key point: you cannot not do hermeneutics anytime you read anything. Anytime you make sense of something, you are doing hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the process of making meaning from texts. Anytime anyone reads anything, they make meaning. Making meaning is the same process as hermeneutics. Therefore, anytime anyone reads anything, they are doing hermeneutics.

This means claims to just read the Bible are either self-deceptive or dishonest. Everyone interprets. The question is not whether you interpret but whether you are aware of and accountable for your interpretive method.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's Seven Movements

I am a white cisgender heterosexual man, and I am talking about a lot of stuff outside my wheelhouse. I am just introducing this scholarship from other people, other voices to look at. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza develops this method in *Wisdom Ways*, which is a great little book. It builds on her work *In Memory of Her*, where she looks at the egalitarian possibilities that emerged in early Christianity and then how that contracted, even by the time we get to First Peter.

Wisdom Ways is fantastic because she talks through these movements and has worksheets on what exactly is a hermeneutics of suspicion, what exactly is a hermeneutics of experience. I wanted to give you those worksheets, but they would not print with my PDF software. They are like two pages long, and they are fantastic. I have them as PDFs I can give you.

The diagram of the seven movements is designed to show you how interconnected these things are. It is not a straight-line process. The bubbles connect to show that you move between these movements, not through them in order.

Movement 1: Hermeneutics of Experience

Begin with your experiences. You are living humans in the world. You experience life, and if you see fire in front of you, how do you say that is not there? She says begin with your experiences. There is no pure experience—experience always comes through culture and language. The personal is political.

Here is where privilege talk becomes really interesting and important. There is a question of what direction to take the language. If you have privilege, it is

unearned. The question becomes: What do I do with this? What am I able to do? But if you are a dominated person in some kind of permanent hierarchy that is always extracting from you, what do you do with that? How do you understand that? Do you understand that as something natural?

A student made a breakthrough connection here. They said that as I talked about beginning with experience, they thought about Jesus saying you will know them by their fruit. What if good fruit is a lens and a tool for discernment? We have written off or prejudged things because we have been told they are not good fruit, but if we go by our experience with clear eyes, we can look at what actually is good fruit—good for you and good for others.

This connects directly to Fiorenza's method. The good fruit criterion provides an evaluative standard rooted in biblical warrant. We can use that criterion to evaluate which interpretations and which aspects of our tradition actually produce good fruit, questioning what we have been told is bad while our experience shows is good.

Movement 2: Hermeneutics of Domination and Social Location

After starting with experience, you read domination and social location. Who is speaking to whom, and for what ends? The ends might not be nefarious. It might just be that they are not thinking about you and your concerns, and that can be enough to create problems.

We realize who is writing these texts, what language they have, what set of references they can work with. Even if they want to describe radical inclusion, do they have the language to describe that? These biblical texts are what we call andro-kyriocentric—not just patriarchy, not just colonialism, but all of those things together, all at once in different ways.

Think about women who converted in the times we are looking at two thousand years ago. If you think of women primarily as constructed in a certain way—if you construct female as not-male—you have no other conceptual space. But that construction also feels comfortable because if I am not that, I know what I am. If that is how you think of things, how does a woman even convert? What language do you have?

In the Acts of Thomas and my favorite, the Acts of Thecla, women fall into what scholars call the Greco-Roman Swoon—an absolute lust-love where his face makes something swell in her breast and she kisses his chains. There is nothing romantic or sexual going on, and these women become amazing leaders. But the texts do not have a way to describe spiritual transformation except through erotic language. That is one thing to keep in mind as you read these texts: language limitations shape what can be expressed.

Movement 3: Hermeneutics of Suspicion

After recognizing who is speaking and what language they have, you practice a hermeneutics of suspicion. Who is speaking to whom and for what ends? These biblical texts are andro-kyriocentric—they come from contexts of patriarchy, colonialism, and multiple intersecting oppressions. Having that in the back of your mind helps you read differently.

Schüssler Fiorenza reminds us that biblical texts come from kyriarchal contexts—lord-master-centered contexts where multiple hierarchies intersect. This is not just about one form of oppression but about interconnected systems of domination. When you read with suspicion, you ask: What is being naturalized here as common sense? What power relationships are being reinforced? Who benefits from this interpretation?

Movement 4: Hermeneutics of Critical Evaluation

What do you do after suspicion? You move to critical evaluation. You assess the impact of the ideology of the text. What does the text do to you if you submit to its vision of the world? Questions of obedience, authority, and interpretation all come into play here.

Scripture becomes a site of struggle, which is kind of cool in a way. I wrestle with this, trying to figure things out. It becomes inspiration rather than a rule book in new situations. When we have a new political situation or social situation, how do we engage it? Do we just withdraw? Do we engage? Lots of questions emerge.

The hope is that people at the bottom of that pyramid of extraction, looking at their experiences and their texts, and people listening to them—maybe you can get some new vision of how to read the text and how to be in the world. If God is at work, I expect it to be down there more than from the top. I do not know how

to fully imagine that, but the notion is you start to listen to those voices as they interpret the text and see where it goes.

Movement 5: Hermeneutics of Creative Imagination

With critical evaluation done, you move into creative imagination. What else can you imagine here? What else might have been going on? If we had two more hours, we would literally do a worksheet where we imagine walking with Mary Magdalene on the road and having to ask her a question in context. If you put yourself in that situation, you start to imagine. What else can I imagine? What else might be going on? What questions do I have? Who knows what emerges from that? This is part of the scary stuff.

Creative imagination is dangerous because you can remake social structures, and you can remake bad ones. If imagination is not guided by critical scholarship and suspicion, you might just recreate oppression in new forms. This is especially important for someone like me—as a middle-class white cisgender heterosexual man, it is hard for me to see what I might be reproducing. This is why I need to listen to voices from margins.

Paulo Freire, a poor communist Brazilian indigenous educator writing in the 1960s during Brazil's military junta, addresses this danger. He says the task is not just for oppressed people to flip the script and make their oppressors into the evil ones, inverting the relationship. He says the challenge is full humanization. The thought is that full humanization comes best from below because that is where people can see the brokenness most clearly. They have to deal with it daily, and then they can imagine better possibilities.

But you still have to keep all this scholarship and critical tools in mind, or you might just recreate oppressive systems. Creative imagination without suspicion and evaluation is dangerous because it can reproduce the very structures it seeks to escape.

Movement 6: Hermeneutics of Re-Remembering and Reconstruction

You cannot just stay in deconstruction where all you can see is how things fall apart. That is helpful and needed—you need to see what is broken. But then you

have to live a life, and you have to construct things to do that. So you move into re-remembering and reconstruction. You listen to voices from below and then do something with what you hear, not just staying in a place where everything crumbles.

The example I want to give—and I know this is a failing terrorist group, so take it for what it is worth—is the Zapatistas. The Zapatistas did not overthrow the Mexican government down in Chiapas. They fought, called a ceasefire after reaching a stalemate, and went back into literally the Lacandon jungle. Instead of continuing armed struggle, they started asking indigenous groups in the region questions. Not imposing their ideology, but asking: How are you suffering? What is terrible in your life? Who is hurting you?

After listening to different indigenous communities with different languages, different customs, different immediate concerns, they found something. These groups said, "Oh, it is neoliberalism, patriarchy, and the state." Those three things —that is what we are all dealing with. So then the Zapatistas knew what to push against. They knew what the common enemy was, not because they imposed a theory from above but because they asked from below and listened. They started to build a "big other"—a coalition of the excluded who could recognize their common oppression even across their differences.

This is reconstruction from below rather than deconstruction from above. It begins by asking people about their actual experiences rather than telling them what their experience should mean. It finds commonalities without erasing differences. And crucially, it avoids recreating hierarchy—the Zapatistas tried to build non-hierarchical structures precisely because hierarchy was part of what was crushing people.

But again, you still have to keep all this scholarship and critical stuff in mind, or you might just recreate oppression. Reconstruction requires the critical tools from suspicion and evaluation, combined with the creativity of imagination, guided by the experiences of those at the bottom of kyriarchal pyramids.

Movement 7: Hermeneutics of Transformative Action

The goal is not just understanding but conscientization—making us aware of how experience is determined and struggling for alternative experiential space from which to read. This interpretation aims for strength and power in struggles for

liberation and transformation. It is not just academic work but work that connects to changing real conditions.

A student observed that usually once a president wins, there is this idea that they are president of all the people. But that seems lacking right now. That gap is why we need reconstruction from below more than ever, because we do not even have leadership at the top saying they represent everyone.

James C. Scott's Hidden Transcripts

I want to pull your attention to James C. Scott's concept of hidden transcripts because it helps us understand how to read these ancient texts differently. I think of all these texts as artifacts made by people in middle levels of power. In a wider social situation, they are oppressed in different ways—intersectionally, which multiplies rather than adds. Yet they are the few people who can read, who can write, and who are speaking on behalf of their communities.

When you have this nested arrangement, you can think about what is okay to perform publicly—that is the public transcript. If I showed up here naked, you would wonder what is going on, right? There is the stuff we do behind closed doors. There is stuff people in power do behind closed doors that would be weird if they did it around us—that is their hidden transcript.

Marginalized communities have hidden transcripts too, as everyone who is part of those communities intimately knows. You have to have those spaces to remain yourself if you cannot be yourself in public. You need those spaces, those cultural technologies. This is why Christians were meeting behind closed doors. When authorities caught those women slave leaders, they said they were meeting behind closed doors.

The same process replicates within communities. What are the Baptist leaders saying versus what are the Baptist people doing? What are the women in that group saying? You keep making these nested structures. An interesting question becomes: there is the text on top, but is there anything else about the community or what is going on or even theology that we can tease out by reading it differently than that hermeneutical spiral method?

If we listen to voices from margins and hidden transcripts, we might discover theological possibilities that the public transcript had to conceal to survive in oppressive contexts.

The Numbers 5 Problem

We need to talk about abortion in the Bible because it reveals how selectively we read texts. You have three sets of passages that deal with fetal life: Numbers 5, passages in Exodus, and poetry passages. When I read the poetry passages, something really important seems to be going on with the fetus. When I read the law cases, something seems important, but not the same as an adult human life—at least legally, principally. What else have you got besides reason and laws?

But then there is Numbers 5, and I hate bringing this up. You have an ancient desert society about to fall apart. Everyone is about to starve. What happens if one man, who is a major person in the family and the society, thinks his male competitor has gotten his wife pregnant? If you do not solve that, you will have a community that falls apart. There is no evidence in this case—just a jealous, insecure man. So how do you solve it when there is no evidence?

They move into sympathetic magic in a very patriarchal way. They drag the woman into the temple, dishevel her hair, make her speak curses over herself: if I have done this, if I have been unfaithful. Then they take dirt from the temple floor, put it in water. They write her possible offense, put it in the water, the ink dissolves, they mix it up. I do not know what else is in there. They force her to drink it while forcing her to say, "If I have been unfaithful, may I have a miscarriage and become infertile."

So they make her drink the water and then God decides what happens through this divination. The community says, "We do not know what happened, we have to solve it, so we will give it up to God."

Student: What about the man?

Imler: He has to just listen. But he has already dragged her in front of the violent authorities. He is already exercising power.

Student: Is she pregnant?

Imler: There is no indication she is. He does not know. That is the whole thing. He is just insecure and jealous. But if she has been unfaithful, the text says she has a discharge and her womb drops. If she has done nothing wrong, nothing happens. So it is like a magical abortifacient that activates if she has been unfaithful and does not activate if she has not.

This is not a feminist text. It is a text that has people doing abortion to other people—men forcing women to have abortions. How do you read that? This gives you a way of reading it other than just accepting it. We have to wrestle with what is in there.

The text also connects to modern anti-abortion rhetoric. Remember that politician who said that if there was real rape, the body has a way to reject pregnancy? That idea comes directly from Numbers 5—the belief that the body will magically respond to unfaithfulness or violation.

Closing: Reconstruction From Below and Living with Complexity

We face choices in how we construct our theology and how we engage texts. We can build brick walls that collapse entirely when challenged, or we can build webs that have resilience and can absorb change. We can read texts assuming they have one simple meaning we must extract like a jewel from rock, or we can wrestle with them as sites of struggle where multiple meanings emerge depending on who is reading and from what social location.

The feminist hermeneutical method from Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza offers a way forward. It does not avoid the anxiety of questioning—it acknowledges that anxiety while providing a method that can absorb challenge and change without total collapse. It does not pretend interpretation is neutral but makes us accountable for our social location and the effects of our interpretations on real people. It does not just deconstruct endlessly but moves toward reconstruction by listening to voices from below—from margins, from hidden transcripts, from people for whom the current system is not designed.

Students are already doing this work. When you look with clear eyes at what produces good fruit—what actually helps people flourish rather than what you

have been told produces good fruit—you are practicing this hermeneutic. When you question what you were told was bad fruit but your experience shows is good, you are doing critical evaluation. When you imagine alternatives to the chaos of our political moment, you are doing creative imagination toward reconstruction.

The goal is not just to understand texts differently but to live differently, to construct communities differently, to resist kyriarchal systems differently. That transformative action emerges from a process that begins with experience, reads power critically, questions who benefits from interpretations, evaluates ideological impact, imagines alternatives creatively, reconstructs from margins, and builds something new while remaining accountable to those at the bottom of extraction pyramids.

This is hard work, and it is scary because it does not offer the false certainty of brick walls. You do not get to just plant your flag and say, "I have got the answer, and anyone who disagrees does not believe the Bible." But it offers something better: the possibility of theology that can grow and change and remain coherent even as we learn new things about ourselves, our world, and the texts we call Scripture. It offers the possibility of building from below rather than imposing from top-down. It offers listening to voices long silenced rather than just repeating what the powerful have always said. It offers struggling together toward fuller humanization—for everyone, including those we might be tempted to make into enemies—rather than just flipping power dynamics.

That is the work we are invited into. Not easy work, not comfortable work, but necessary work if we take seriously both the texts we have inherited and the people—especially those at the margins—who are reading those texts from their own experiences and finding things there that challenge what we thought we knew. The seven movements give us a method: experience, domination analysis, suspicion, evaluation, imagination, reconstruction, and transformative action. These movements interconnect and support each other, creating resilience rather than fragility.

When we opened today, I talked about the ESV and Wayne Grudem and manufactured hierarchy in the Trinity. That is one way to read texts—starting with power, building walls, excluding people. The method we have explored today offers another way: starting with experience, especially from below; reading power critically; imagining alternatives; and reconstructing toward justice. Both are choices about hermeneutics, but they lead to radically different conclusions about

God, about Scripture, about who is included in the community, and about what flourishing looks like.

As we move forward in this class and in your own engagement with Scripture, you now have tools to make those hermeneutical choices consciously rather than just inheriting them unreflectively. You can ask: Who benefits from this interpretation? Whose voices are silenced? What does this text do if we submit to its vision? What else might be going on beneath the surface? What good fruit actually grows from this reading? Those questions do not make interpretation easier, but they make it more honest, more accountable, and more open to the liberating work of God moving from the margins toward the center, from below toward transformation of the whole.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York: Crossroad, 1983.

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler. *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1970.

Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

LCARS

- The GAI tools used were: *Whipser*, *Akio* and *Minstral*.
  - Lectures are recorded, transcribed locally with *Whisper* [*Aiko*] and then outlined and glossed locally by *Mistral* for archival after review and expansion by the professor.
  - More: LCARS-Full-GAI.